

Kaitlyn Drake, Student Outreach Coordinator and Campus Lead for Every Voice Coalition

In favor of HB-6374. Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

2 March, 2021

Chairman Elliot, Chairman Haskell, and honorable members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

My name is Kaitlyn Drake, and I am a Student Outreach Coordinator and Fairfield University's Campus Lead for Every Voice Coalition. I am in my spring semester of my sophomore year, and though from New York, I live at Fairfield more often than my hometown. I am writing in support of House Bill 6374, a bill that proposes protections for survivors of sexual violence on college campuses. This issue is close to my heart and greatly impacts my livelihood.

As someone who openly identifies as a queer woman on a college campus, I immediately acquired two targets on my back, making sexual violence against me a more imminent threat. Though my university has an office to protect its marginalized students, it is still rarely the case that they get the support that they need. Many of my own friends, including those who are queer, women, of color, or multiple of those identities, are afraid to walk home alone at night despite our blue light systems and safe location.

Last year, on the floor above my own in my residence hall last year, multiple young women were assaulted by a singular male. Only a few came forward to tell their stories. Fortunately, the perpetrator was arrested, but many of these young women were traumatized. The women who did not come forward also did not have a chance to tell their stories anonymously and without investigation, which Title IX statutes require. While Fairfield University has a campus-wide amnesty policy, some colleges in Connecticut do not provide this option. Instead, these schools force survivors into silence and compliance with injustice.

I was fortunate enough to not be put in this situation, but I have been feeling that it is not a matter of if I get assaulted, but when I get assaulted. One in five women experience sexual violence in college. 73% of LGBTQ+ college students have experienced sexual harassment or violence while on campus. Most do not report, either from fear of repercussions or from fear of an investigation.

It is imperative that we give survivors more avenues to empower themselves and others with their stories. HB-6374 can change this. The Biennial Campus Climate survey would not only provide survivors with a safe option to relay their experience, but it would also give us more insight to the safety of college campuses. The Biennial administration of the survey would also allow for more data, especially from community colleges, which have a higher turnover rate of students, and from Connecticut's public universities, which have lower retention rates. The

Biennial Survey in conjunction with the state-wide Amnesty Policy would finally allow schools and legislators to combat sexual violence in a meaningful way.

No one should feel that their bodily autonomy is threatened, especially in a sanction of higher education. As members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, it is your duty to protect those who need it, especially women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. It is time to open new avenues of justice for survivors of sexual assault and to finally be able to effectively combat this epidemic. It is time to pass HB-6374.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Kaitlyn Drake